The West Australian

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The *grain* debate

Do we need them? ALECIA HANCOCK reports.

When My Kitchen Rules celebrity chef Pete Evans espoused the health benefits of a grain-free diet, people sat up and listened.

Evans isn't the only celebrity voice to endorse a paleo or grain-free life, but his opinion has certainly increased the attack on the humble grain.

The paleo diet encourages us to eat like our Palaeolithic ancestors — and that includes shunning grains, which weren't harvested back then.

Nora Gedgaudas, a US-based paleo diet expert and author, says humans are not designed to eat grains.

"There is simply no evidence for a grain/legume-based diet anywhere in the pre-agricultural human fossil record, or for any significant amount of grains consumed during our prehistory," she says.

While some anthropologists support Ms Gedgaudas' argument, others have challenged it, saying what has been attributed to the hunter-gatherer lifestyle may be largely inaccurate.

Ms Gedgaudas believes grains are not essential to our diet in any way. "The hunter-gatherer diet our ancestors subsisted upon for over 2.5 million years is far more deeply and indelibly imprinted into our DNA than our agricultural habits of the last few thousand years."

Ms Gedgaudas says our dietary changes over the last 10,000 years have led to our brain size progressively shrinking. She adds it is also affecting our weight.

"Grain is what we feed to cattle to fatten them up," she says. "We could additionally take a hint from that."

Dietitians Association of Australian spokesperson Margaret Hays says it's pointless to compare cattle to humans.

"Humans and cattle are fundamentally different for a start and people choose their own diet where cattle in a feedlot situation can't do that," she says. "As dietitians we do recommend people eat grains as part of a balanced and varied diet."

While some people have had success with a grain-free diet, Ms Hays says it is not suitable for everyone.

"They are looking at the short-term and not the long-term health. Wholegrain in particular reduces risks of colon cancer, for example. Some of the grains high in soluble fibre are good for reducing cholesterol, too."

Ms Hays says she is frustrated when celebrity endorsements push misleading nutritional information on to the public.

"I feel sad there is so much misinformation out there," she says. "People coming in to see me are in a very confused state about what they should eat. They are trying these fad diets and they are ending up worse off."

Restricting or removing an entire food group can lead to dangerous eating habits, Ms Hays warns. "I see nutritional deficiencies and people developing disordered eating patterns," she says.

But Ms Gedgaudas argues manufacturers and industry groups have influenced nutritional guidelines in Australia.

"No human group in the history of the species has ever eaten a diet remotely resembling what government guidelines suggest as optimal," she says. "There can be no question that corporate lobbyists and multibillion-dollar multinational interests hold sway with public policy. A carbohydrate and grain-based diet is exceedingly profitable for numerous multinational industries."

But Ms Hays disputes this, adding she has total faith in Australian dietary guidelines.

INSIDE: Pete Evans' grain-free dinner.

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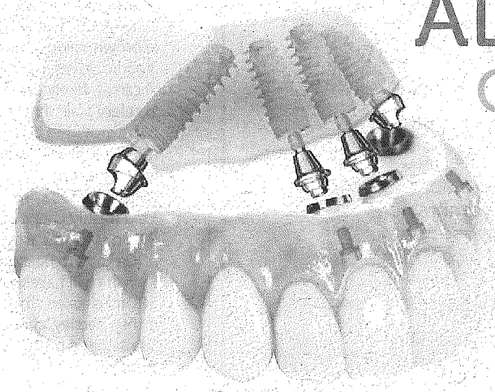

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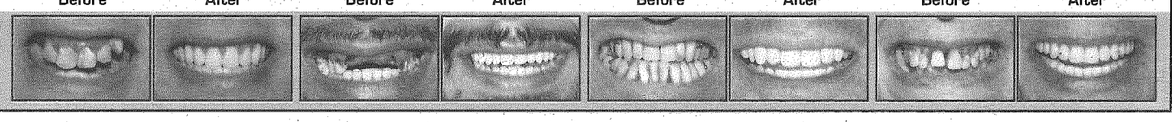

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Refrain from the grain?

The head of Australia's dietian body and the poster boy for the paleo movement debate whether we should stop eating grains.

NO

Celebrity-endorsed diets tend to single out specific nutrients, substances or foods to be avoided. The paleo diet is the latest fad to receive attention in Australia and, unfortunately, its supporters have put a nutritious food — grains — on its hit list.

Casting the spotlight on one type of food, such as grains, incorrectly suggests that that one food is the sole barrier that stands between healthy and unhealthy living. This is overly simplistic, misleading and without scientific basis.

The Dietitians Association of Australia supports the Australian Dietary Guidelines, which recognise the importance of a balanced diet, and encourage a variety of grain foods.

The guidelines recommend people "enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from the five food groups every day". One of the foods groups is grain — which includes grain foods (preferably wholegrain and/or high-fibre varieties), such as breads, breakfast cereals, rice, pasta, noodles, polenta, couscous, oats, quinoa and barley.

Australia's Grains and Legumes Nutrition Council recommends: "Australians enjoy grain foods three to four times a day, choosing at least half as wholegrain or high-fibre grain foods."

Grains and grain-based foods are an important energy source for the brain and muscles. They provide key nutrients in the Australian diet — including protein, carbohydrate, fibre, folate, niacin, thiamine, iron, zinc and magnesium — and are satiating, helping people feel full. These carbohydrate foods are fuel to the probiotic (helpful) bacteria in the gut and are critical for a healthy digestive tract.

The scientific evidence shows that people who eat more wholegrain or high-fibre grain foods are less likely to be overweight, have smaller waist circumferences and are less likely to develop chronic diseases, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer.

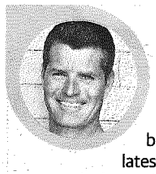
Don't confuse grains foods with refined carbohydrates (found in foods such as biscuits, cakes and some savoury snacks), which should be limited.

The guidelines were recently revised by the National Health and Medical Research Council and the updated guidelines were released last year.

The Australian public can be confident in the recommendations, which were developed by independent experts in the field of nutrition and are based on scientific evidence and more than 55,000 studies. There is an open submission process, weighed up against the scientific literature by the NHMRC guidelines committee.

Accredited practising dietitians can help people reach their health goals. A fad diet cannot.

Liz Kellett, Dieticians Association of Australia president
daa.asn.au



YES

I choose not to eat grains because the latest scientific research shows that modern-day pantry staples — in the form of breads, pastas and other starchy carbohydrate-based foods — do no good for health and wellbeing.

It was while studying to be a health coach that I first came across Nora Gedgaudas and I discovered the scientific research that supports the fact humans aren't, and never were, designed to eat grains in the quantities being touted by our current health guidelines.

And by examining our alarming statistics of obesity and chronic illness — a lot of which is preventable through wiser diet choices — you could make that assumption too.

You see, research is showing more and more that today's manipulated, modified, modern-day grain strains offer little nutritional value and our bodies don't actually need to consume them to function.

In fact, if we train our bodies to run on high-fat, low-carbohydrate foods, our metabolism learns to run on ketones (fats) instead of glucose (sugar).

The result is that we feel fitter, faster and stronger, both mentally and physically, because it helps to regulate hormones and moods.

The main thing is to understand why not eating grains, if at all possible, is one of the most important steps you can take towards achieving optimal physical and mental health.

Grains were never a major part of a Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer diet and that's why they aren't a large part of a modern-day hunter-gatherer's diet either.

Being gluten-free isn't a "fad" diet. The reality is more and more scientific research is showing that our bodies aren't designed to mitigate the damaging effects of grains caused by lectins, gluten, and phytates.

Lectins are bad — they bind to insulin receptors, cause metabolic havoc and affect an important hormone called leptin. And phytates block the ability to absorb minerals and nutrients from food.

The human body, meanwhile, hasn't yet adapted to gluten — which is found in wheat, barley and rye. And so, more often than not, many people's bodies will find ways to reject it.

About one per cent of Australians are coeliac; people who are completely intolerant to any gluten. For them, any presence of gluten in the diet can be disastrous.

Just because you're not coeliac doesn't mean you aren't susceptible to the ravages of gluten.

Yet today, as we are exposed to more grains (and thus gluten) in our diets, we suffer from more chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, cancer and autoimmune diseases, than any other time in human history.

But it wasn't until the agricultural revolution took hold that humans began to consume grains regularly because they were easy to mass-produce.

Today, our grain sources are more modified and manipulated than ever before and as we've become further removed from the sources of our food with the advent of wide-scale, profit-driven production, scientific research also shows our brains may have shrunk by as much as 10 per cent over the past 10,000 years. Scary stuff!

How then could grains ever be considered to be one of our "essential" food groups? When we've got access to grass-fed meat, wild seafood, pasture-raised poultry, pork and wild game as well as eggs from pasture-raised chooks, fresh fruit and vegies, why would we rely on modified cereal grains to form a large proportion of our daily diets? Add to that, that they are also the blandest of foods on the planet that any cook or chef has to work with. Think about a bowl of pasta or rice with nothing on it . . . you have to admit it has little going for it on the taste front.

The bare fact is we do not need grains to survive and that's why I choose not to eat them.

Ever since I cut wheat and grains out of my diet — as well as refined sugar and dairy — I've never felt in better health. And that's far more important to me than eating pasta or a slice of gluten-filled bread!

Cook with love and laughter.

Pete Evans, celebrity chef
peteevanschef.com

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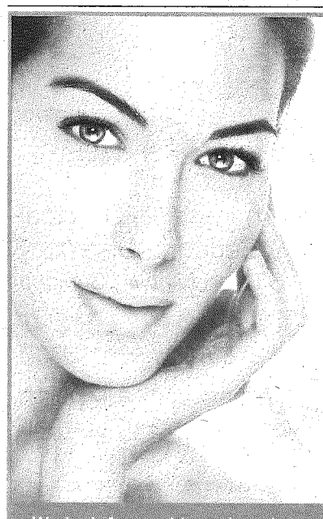

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Try PETE EVANS' paleo grain-free bolognese for dinner

BOLOGNESE WITH SAUTEED KALE AND PALEO PARMESAN
(Serves 4)
Ingredients
Bolognese:
2 tbsp duck fat, ghee, coconut oil or other good-quality fat
½ brown onion, chopped
3 garlic cloves, minced
½ carrot, finely diced
½ celery stalk, finely diced
550g grass-fed beef mince or other red-meat mince (venison, kangaroo, lamb or emu)
250ml dry red wine
1 tsp freshly chopped oregano
2 tbsp tomato paste
500g tomato passata
1 pinch chilli flakes (optional)
300ml chicken stock
4 tbsp parsley, chopped
Sea salt and freshly cracked black pepper
Sauteed kale
3 cloves garlic, minced
3 tbsp duck fat, ghee, coconut oil or other good-quality fat
2 bunches kale, stalks removed and leaves torn
6 tbsp chicken stock
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Paleo parmesan
70g macadamia nuts (activated by soaking in water, if possible), finely ground
1 tbsp parsley, chopped finely
1 anchovy fillet in salt, rinsed, patted dry and finely chopped
1 tbsp ghee or coconut oil, melted
½ lemon, finely zested
Sea salt and freshly cracked black pepper
Preheat the oven to 140C.
Method
To make the paleo parmesan: Combine all the ingredients in a bowl and mix until well combined. Season with a pinch of sea salt. Spread the nut mixture on to a baking tray lined with baking paper and bake in the oven for 5-6 minutes or until lightly golden. Allow to cool, then set aside.

To make the bolognese: Heat the oil in a large frying pan over a medium-high heat. Add the onions, carrots and celery, then cook for 4-5 minutes or until softened. Next, add the garlic and cook for a further 1 minute, or until fragrant and starting to brown. Add the mince and brown for 5-6 minutes, breaking up the meat with a wooden spoon into smaller pieces. Stir in the wine and oregano and cook until the wine is almost evaporated; this will take about 4-5 minutes. Add the tomato paste and cook for 1 minute. Add the passata, half the chicken stock, chilli flakes (if using) and season with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Simmer on a low heat for 15 minutes and add the rest of the stock if needed. Toss the parsley through and keep the Bolognese sauce warm.

To prepare the kale: Heat a large frying pan over a medium-high heat, add the oil and garlic to the pan and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the kale and chicken stock and cook for 3 minutes, tossing occasionally until wilted. Season with salt and pepper. You can do this in batches if your pan is not big enough to contain all the kale.

To serve: Divide the sauteed kale on to four serving plates and top with bolognese sauce, then sprinkle with the paleo parmesan on top.